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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENTIANE 000434

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [TH](#) [LA](#)

SUBJECT: THREAT TO DEPORT LAO HMONG GROUP FROM PETCHABOON

REF: A. VIENTIANE 396

[1](#)B. VIENTIANE 390

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia M. Haslach, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Several sources reported to us over the weekend that Thai authorities had arrested a group of 24 Lao citizen ethnic Hmong in Petchaboon province on May 11 and had threatened to deport them to Laos. According to these sources the Hmong were "remote people" who had fled Laos as a result of military activity. One of our sources also told us Thai authorities had attempted to deport a separate group of 16 Hmong from Petchaboon the week of May 1-5, but Lao authorities had refused to accept them. The Lao officially will not acknowledge any of the Hmong in Petchaboon, including these recent arrivals, could be Lao citizens, and the GoL appears to have alerted its border officials along the Mekong to guard against "illegal" deportations from Thailand. Hmong remaining in the forest are desperate, and some may be considering reprisals against Lao civilian targets. End summary.

New Groups

[1](#)2. (C) Several sources informed us May 12 that Thai authorities in Petchaboon province had arrested a group of 24 ethnic Hmong from Laos and had threatened to deport them back to Laos over the weekend. Two sources -- a Hmong source in Thailand and a U.S.-based American citizen -- said the Hmong were members of "remote people" groups who had faced attack by Lao military forces and had fled to Thailand only last week. These sources related the group was being held in Khao Kho district jail pending their return to Laos. This is the same facility where the group of Hmong children were held immediately after their arrest, and where the two drivers from that group continue to be held. Informed about the possible deportation by one of the same sources, AP reported this story on May 12.

[1](#)3. (C) We also heard from our Thai-based Hmong source that during the week of May 1-5 Thai authorities in Petchaboon had attempted to deport a separate group of 16 Lao citizen Hmong, a group that included 14 recent arrivals to Petchaboon and the two male drivers arrested with the group of 27 Hmong deported to Laos in December and held in Khao Kho since that time. Thai authorities took these 16 Lao to the Mekong river town of Ban Kok Phai in Loei province and alerted police in the Lao village of Ban Wan across the river that they were deporting "Lao citizens." However, the Lao police would not

allow the group to be sent over and ultimately the 16 Hmong were taken back to Khao Kho district jail. Our source believed these 16 were being held with the 24 Hmong arrested last week.

14. (C) In a conversation today, the MFA Press Spokesman Yong Chanthalangsy said he was alerted to the possible deportation of the 24 Hmong by the AP story Friday, but said there was "no evidence" they were Lao citizens. Yong asserted any informal deportation across the Mekong river would be "illegal," as the Lao would first need to vet any deportees to ensure they were Lao citizens. He claimed that Lao police up and down the Mekong were on the alert for this sort of deportation and were under orders not to accept any returnees from Thailand who did not go through a formal repatriation. Yong said Laos did not want to have "another big problem," apparently referring to the 26 missing Hmong children (ref A).

Thai Take on the Groups

15. (C) Bangkok Refcoord contacted the Thai National Security Council on May 15 regarding reports of Hmong deportations. Based on information from an NGO contact early last week, Refcoord and UNHCR had contacted the NSC and expressed concern about a group of 16 Hmong who reportedly had been arrested and were in jail at a location about 30 miles east of the Petchaboon site. There was no indication at that time that the Thai were considering deportation of the group. On May 15, although the normal NSC interlocutor was out of the office, another NSC staffer stated that the NSC had directed Thai immigration not to deport the group of 16. It is not completely certain that the group of 16 mentioned above by the Hmong source is the same group since the group inquired

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about last week had reportedly arrived in Thailand several months ago. Thai NSC staff also stated on May 15 that no deportation activity was anticipated for the group of 24 Hmong.

Comment

16. (C) The Lao appear to be on guard against informal deportations by the Thai. The claim that the groups facing deportation are recent arrivals to Thailand indicates at least some Hmong are slipping through the Lao and Thai dragnet and making their way to Petchaboon. Our sources tell us that at least some of these people are literally fleeing for their lives. Lao military pressure against "remote people" groups in Bolikhamsai and Vientiane provinces has forced many Hmong to flee those areas and make their way out of the country as best they can (ref B). If they are indeed "remote people," they will face arrest on their return, especially any of their number who are males of arms-bearing age.

17. (C) On that note, one of our sources, with close contacts to Laos' insurgents, has reported that the key leaders of these Hmong bands are looking to leave the country but want to know what their options are. They feel they are between a rock and a hard place, and are unlikely to flee if they believe they will be arrested by the Thai and handed back to the Lao, for certain imprisonment and likely execution. With their backs to the wall, they are also looking at other tactics. The same source said he had heard talk among "some groups" of launching reprisals against Lao civilians to exact revenge for their persecution. We have stressed (a point our source readily supports) that any tit-for-tat attacks will only result in more needless bloodshed and will likely escalate the Lao military's efforts to wipe them out. End comment.

18. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.

HASLACH